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Abstract

An experimental bibliography ccurse designed fcr prospective graduate students suggests three major course content divisicns. The unit topics include: (1) evaluation of the usefulness cf reference tcols, (2) discussicn cf literary pericdicals, structure cf modern articles, and dccumentaticn, and (3) an intrcducticn to descriptive-analytical bibliography. Reference is made to resource materials fcr the ccurse. (RI)

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AN UNDERGRADUATE COURSE IN BIBLIOGRAPHY

In 1962 and again in 1964 the Department of English at Spring Hill College offered an experimental course in bibliography (EN 199) designed for prospective graduate students. The course was divided into three units: (1) an evaluation of the usefulness of various reference tools; (2) a discussion of literary periodicals, the structure of modern

articles, and matters of documentation; (3) a brief introduction to the complex subject of descriptive-analytical bibliography. Since a systematic treatment of the various phases of bibliography has, I believe, an established placed in the graduate curricula of most universities, the general subject matter of our course has no claims of being unique; but, as far as I know, it is rare to offer undergraduates a formal survey of the tools and techniques of the profession—an abbreviated but not watered-down survey. The rationale behind the course is simple: unless a graduate student takes a course in bibliography during the first semester of his graduate career, he may do some dangerous stumbling while wandering through the intricate mazes of modern scholarship; adequate preparation for successful graduate studies requires more than an incidental initiation into a variety of professional matters.

After twelve hours of lower-division courses in composition and literature, our majors complete a minimum of twenty-four hours of upper-division English courses; in order to prevent EN 199 from displacing a needed course in literature, it was scheduled as a one-hour course, though it required approximately the same amount of work as the normal three-hour course. The students were warned in advance that EN 199 would be demanding and that the assigned credit hour would not reflect the amount of required labor. Once they realized that the course would have practical relevance to their future careers, they completed the work cheerfully and diligently.

In teaching EN 199, I employed one of the well-known texts containing enumerations of important reference tools; but I found it necessary to supplement this text with a series of annotated lists of selected books and periodicals, the annotations being derived from prefaces, Constance Winchell's *Guide to Reference Books*, my personal observations, etc. As might be expected, a series of problems was assigned weekly, at first one-step problems and then gradually more complicated projects. Obviously the problems are essential. Unless the student actually searches through a reference book for a desired piece of information, the existence of the book and its special function may easily slip from his memory. Also, to encourage efficiency, I adopted the familiar practice of assigning problems which had to be completed within a specified time limit. As a final project, each student was required to compile two original enumerative bibliographies, one on a particular work of literature and the other on a selected literary topic; some of the final projects were extensive and valuable, perhaps worthy of publication. At the end of eight weeks it was very encouraging to find the students able to speak intelligently about and, more importantly, to use efficiently *CBEL*, *CBI*, the *STC*, Leary's *Articles on American Literature*, *Abstracts of English Studies*, the various period bibliographies, and dozens of other important or at least useful tools.

During the second unit the students were required to inspect carefully a variety of periodicals (oral reports and discussion followed), to study the *MLA Style Sheet*, and to read the MLA pamphlet *On the Publication of Research*. Realizing that many young graduate students find themselves teaching freshman composition with little or no direct preparation, I particularly encouraged the students to begin reading *College English* regularly in order to become familiar with some of the recent trends in composition courses and to discover the many helpful pieces of advice published by experienced teachers. When the course is next offered, I hope to make a subscription to *College English* mandatory.

In the case of descriptive-analytical bibliography, my goals were very limited: essential terms were defined and illustrations were given where possible (watermarks, chain-lines, signatures, etc.), sections in McKerrow's *Introduction to Bibliography* were assigned, and some work was done with collational formula and the transcription of title-pages. After requiring in 1962 a formal description of a pre-eighteenth-century book from each student, I simplified the assignment in 1964 and merely required each student to present a single collation and a transcript of a title-page. Some students found this phase of the course particularly interesting; others were, understandably I suppose, a little confused. This is the only phase of the course which I still consider experimental.

Basic texts for an undergraduate or graduate course in bibliography are now plentiful. For a list of bibliographical handbooks see, for instance, pp. 13-15 of Richard D. Altick and Andrew Wright's *Selective Bibliography for the Study of English and American Literature* (a serviceable handbook itself; 2nd ed., Macmillan, 1963). Several other possible texts have been published recently: James Thorpe, *Literary Scholarship* (Houghton Mifflin, 1964); Donald A. Sears, *The Discipline of English* (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963); Richard D. Altick, *The Art of Literary Research* (W. W. Norton, 1963). The *MLA Style Sheet*, McKerrow's *Introduction to Bibliography*, and a variety of other books could be used as required texts or assigned as supplementary readings.

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